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Record Searchlight

TELEVISION

Olsens play with a full corporate house

By Tracy L. Scott
The Washington Post

In 1987 they were introduced to TV viewers as Michelle Tanner on ABC's "Full House." At 9 months old, Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, fraternal twins filling the role of one infant — became the show's stars, outshining their castmates with their natural charm.

Now, at 15, the sisters have quietly added business sense to that charm. In addition to being media darlings, they have become media moguls.

They are now in charge and very vocal in the everyday business of their Dualstar Entertainment Group Inc., whose 2001 sales are expected to exceed \$500 million, according to their publicist Michael Pagnotta.

The sisters' careers have grown into an empire that includes a fashion line, a popular internet site, videos and video games, TV series, dolls, books and a magazine. They are credited as designers, executive producers, editors-in-chief and actresses.

The Hollywood Reporter hailed them "The Most Powerful Young Women in Hollywood."

Mary-Kate said her favorite hat to wear is that of actress. Ashley said she enjoys designing clothes.

"If I wasn't acting, I'd want to be a fashion designer, but I still like acting," Ashley said.

Their new animated series, "Mary-Kate and Ashley in Action," normally airs on ABC Saturday mornings at 7.

Fans of the family-oriented "Full House," their first series that enjoyed an eight-year run, literally watched the girls grow up, which may be one secret to their success.

"They have a really wholesome image," said Dualstar CEO and co-executive producer Robert Thorne. "No sex, drugs or rock 'n' roll. Parents embrace and support that."

Although many people may have lost sight of them after "Full House" was canceled, the sisters were busy building their empire one brick at a time starting with home videos, CDs and books for children.

The Olsen twins continue to target their products and programs to their peer group, or "twens and teens," a phrase that refers to ages 6 to 16.

Although Mary-Kate and Ashley are legal minors, that does not affect their ability to control their company, according to Thorne, who was first hired years ago as the twins' attorney.

However, they are affected by child labor laws that limit how many hours the teenagers can work.

"Just because they cannot sign contracts does not mean they cannot indicate whether or not they want a contract signed," Thorne said. "Politically, they have power equal to mine; legally they have none. They're in charge and in control. They're my peers in decision- and strategy-making. They don't do anything that they don't want to do."

"They're very savvy and have very sound judgment as businesswomen. When they're 18, they'll be listed as presidents," he said.

In the meantime, the sisters live in Los Angeles with their parents, brothers and sisters and still get an allowance. The twins have an older brother, younger sister and two younger half-siblings.

Not only are the Olsen twins involved in almost every facet of the entertainment

The Olsen Empire

- **Television:** "Mary-Kate and Ashley in Action," an animated series, airs on ABC Saturday mornings.
- **Video:** Nearly 24 million copies sold. No. 1 family entertainment supplier for Warner Home Videos. No. 1 franchise for movies made for video release.
- **Video games:** Launched Acclaim's youth division in 1999. Two top 10 Gameboy Color titles.
- **Books:** Three titles published each month.

industry, but their brand name and products are also, in most cases, the most successful of their class.

Their Mattel dolls have out-sold the Britney Spears doll and have even surpassed Barbie in sales for some months. Their fashion line also generated more sales during back-to-school shopping months than other teen-age clothing lines, according to Pagnotta.

In October, Wal-Mart launched a new store-within-a-store at locations in Vestal, N.Y. and Kansas City, Mo., where consumers are able to purchase all the Mary-Kate and Ashley products in one area. Three more stores-within-a-store are planned for January.

"We have something so different from anyone else," Ashley said. "I don't really think there's anyone to compare us to."

They've earned more than "Home Alone" star Macaulay Culkin and Shirley Temple combined, Thorne said.

"It's children's entertainment that's not a purple dinosaur," Pagnotta said.

The Olsens have been described in marketing terms as a combination of Oprah Winfrey and Martha Stewart. The twins have accomplished more in corporate terms than many of their adult counterparts in the industry.

Their popularity among their target audience, in home video sales, is second only to Disney, according to Billboard KidVid charts.

As successful as they have been in the industry, Mary-Kate and Ashley say they are wary of overexposure.

"We've been talking about that more recently," said Mary-Kate. "We definitely don't want to do that and be in everybody's faces. We don't want to annoy the parents."

Pagnotta suggested that a key to the twins' success is that "They're entertaining without aspiring to be role models."

CINEMARK

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THE SEASON

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Olsens Play With A Full Corporate House

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